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New York

Chairman: Mr. Mernier ..... (Belgium)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda items 63 to 79 *(continued)*

General debate on all disarmament and international security items

Mr. Pham Quang Vinh (Viet Nam): At the outset allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of this important Committee. I am confident that under your able guidance this session will have a successful outcome. I should like to assure you and the Bureau of my delegation's full support and cooperation.

The end of the cold war has brought mankind much hope for an extensive peace dividend. Indeed it has offered enormous opportunities for the greater advancement of the common quest of nations for peace and prosperity and their cooperation in shared objectives. Nations are able to focus more on the most immediate needs for the life and prosperity of their people — poverty alleviation, employment expansion, economic and social development, environment protection, childcare, and so on, and this has been reflected in the series of world summits that have been held during this decade.

In the field of disarmament welcome progress has also been made with, notably: the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which for the first time in history bans a whole category of weapons of mass destruction; the conclusion of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT); the agreements on the principles and objectives and the strengthening of the review mechanism of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT); and the enhanced efforts towards the establishment and consolidation of nuclear-weapon-free zones. However, the much-anticipated peace dividend has yet to arrive and has, in fact, to be vigorously fought for. The world is also presented with no less pressing challenges.

At the turn of a new millennium mankind is still living under the threat of nuclear weapons. The horror of the first-time use of nuclear bombs, even though that happened more than half a century ago, remains as fresh in the mind and as haunting today as then. The end of the cold war has rendered the doctrines of nuclear deterrence and the perceived justifications of the proponents of such doctrines even more obsolete. The world community had so hoped to initiate a process that would actually lead to the total elimination of nuclear weapons. However, such weapons still exist and their stockpiles remain unacceptably large and are being further upgraded.

Most of all there remains the regrettable lack of an express will and determination by the nuclear-weapon States to rid their security strategies of nuclear deterrence and actually to work towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons. This needs to be reversed to facilitate breakthroughs on the issues related to nuclear disarmament and to help in the work of such multilateral forums as the Disarmament Commission, the Conference on Disarmament, or the Preparatory Committee for the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Under legally binding instruments, the nuclear-weapon States are obligated to conduct genuine nuclear disarmament leading to the total elimination of nuclear weapons. The provisions of the NPT

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need to be fully implemented and in this context these States must, in particular, fulfil the obligations stipulated by article VI of the Treaty.

My delegation shares the view of many delegations - a view that was further underlined by the Secretary-General in his remarks at the opening of the Committee's general debate - that nuclear disarmament must remain at the top of the agenda of the United Nations and the world community as a whole.

The very existence of nuclear weapons has been denounced since their invention and they alone represent a threat to international peace and security and the survival of mankind. The countries of the Non-Aligned Movement have therefore made clear, especially in the circumstances of the world after the cold war their rejection of the arguments pursued by the nuclear-weapon States that such weapons provide unique security benefits. Here may I quote the profound assessments made by Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Jayantha Dhanapala, in his 12 October 1998 statement before a conference in Brussels:

> "The architects of global security for the coming millennium can no longer credibly argue that the world has only one choice, between nuclear apartheid and nuclear anarchy. There is indeed a choice to be made, but it is between nuclear-weaponized war and a nuclear-weapon-free world. The only sustainable choice is nuclear disarmament."

My delegation fully shares those assessments. The world and its inhabitants will be more secure in the absence of nuclear weapons. That was the hard experience learned from the cold war. The end of the cold war demands as well as creates conditions facilitating a process towards genuine nuclear disarmament. The complexity of armaments in today's war situation further underlines the need and urgency to step up efforts and work even harder to achieve disarmament objectives, especially the elimination of nuclear weapons.

My delegation welcomes the various initiatives aimed at accelerating the process of nuclear disarmament and working towards a world free from nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. The proposal for a programme of action for the elimination of nuclear weapons within a time-bound framework remains valid. We are convinced that it is time to start a course of negotiations to arrive at a convention to ban nuclear weapons altogether, as the world has done with regard to chemical weapons.

In this regard, the Non-Aligned Summit held recently in Durban called for the establishment by the Conference on Disarmament, as the highest priority, of an ad hoc committee, and called for the holding of an international conference aimed at achieving agreement on a phased programme for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons within a specified time-frame. It is welcome that this year the Conference on Disarmament agreed to establish the ad hoc committees to conduct negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty and on assurances to non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

Viet Nam welcomes and supports the efforts of countries in different regions of the world working towards the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones. We share the conviction that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among States of the region concerned contributes positively to the enhancement of international peace and security. We commend such efforts and progress, notably the Treaties of Tlatelolco, Rarotonga, Pelindaba and Bangkok. We support the approach of building a southern hemisphere free of nuclear weapons, using the achievements of the existing zones as the basis from which to start. The Treaty on the South-East Asia Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone has entered into force, and we call upon the nuclear-weapon States to sign the protocol of the Treaty early so as to enable it to be fully effective.

Viet Nam shares the grave concern about the consequences of the indiscriminate use of landmines. We fully recognize the gravity of the problem and the tragedy in terms of both human and material losses of such indiscriminate uses. Thus we support a strict prohibition on indiscriminate use of these types of weapons and a moratorium on their export. Viet Nam holds that mine-clearance, assistance in demining and humanitarian assistance are very important to the mine-affected countries and peoples, and calls for greater efforts in this regard. Those are the common aims that we share. The issue here is that the indiscriminate use of mines must be strictly prohibited while recognizing the right of States to resort to the help of such weapons of a defensive nature for the defence of their sovereignty and territorial integrity as provided for in the Charter of the United Nations. Cognizant of this fundamental distinction, we will be able together to further promote our long-cherished humanitarian care and concern.

It is the consistent position of Viet Nam to support all efforts aimed at building a world of peace, justice and

prosperity, free from nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Along this line Viet Nam has become a party to many disarmament treaties, including the Biological Weapons Convention, the NPT, the Chemical Weapons Convention, and so on. We have signed the CTBT and the CWC. Today I wish to inform the Committee that, having accomplished the procedures to ratify the CWC, Viet Nam deposited its instrument of ratification with the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 30 September 1998 and became the one hundred eighteenth State party to this important Convention.

As we, the community of nations, enter a new millennium, we need to solidify our determination and accelerate our efforts to build a world of lasting peace and security and of development and prosperity for all. My delegation believes that this lasting peace and security must be constructed on an equal premise for all, and that only in conditions of peace and security can development and prosperity be consolidated and promoted. It will remain therefore in our view a matter of the highest priority to free this planet from nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and to devise mechanisms to ban them totally and resolutely.

In this context my delegation believes that the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament should be convened to chart a new course of action in the field of disarmament building upon the achievements recorded at the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, the twentieth anniversary of which we are commemorating this year, and those achievements recorded thereafter. We are convinced that this session of the First Committee will contribute towards that end.

The Chairman: I call on Ambassador Soutar of the United Kingdom, who will speak in his capacity as the President of the Conference on Disarmament on the report of that Conference.

Mr. Soutar (United Kingdom): I wish to extend to you, Sir, my warmest congratulations on your election to the high office of Chairman of this Committee and wish you every success in the discharge of your responsibilities. It is indeed a pleasure to see a fellow diplomat from the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva guiding our deliberations on security and disarmament issues, and I pledge my full cooperation and support in your endeavours. My congratulations also go to the other members of the Bureau who assist you in your tasks.

As you have noted, Sir, I am speaking in my capacity as President of the Conference on Disarmament to present to the First Committee the report of the Conference on its work during the 1998 session. This report is contained in document A/53/27, which is before members.

As members of the Committee are aware, after the conclusion of the negotiations on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996 the Conference on Disarmament underwent a period of pause and reflection. It had to take stock, to review the priorities before it, and had to undertake a consensus-building process on the next steps. These efforts have been pursued intensively and have now resulted in the establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on Effective International Arrangements to Assure Non-Nuclear Weapon States against the Use or Threat of Use of Nuclear Weapons, as well as an ad hoc committee under item 1 of the agenda entitled "Cessation of the Nuclear Arms Race and Nuclear Disarmament" to negotiate, on the basis of the report of the Special Coordinator (CD/1299) and the mandate contained therein, a non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

The fact that the Conference was able to establish two negotiating mechanisms on important nuclear issues is a sign of its vitality and its ability to meet new challenges of a world in constant political flux.

The Ad Hoc Committee on Effective International Arrangements to Assure Non-Nuclear-Weapon States against the Use or Threat of Use of Nuclear Weapons held substantive exchanges of views on all aspects of the issue, during which the importance attached to this item was confirmed, together with a widely shared readiness to engage in a search for a mutually acceptable solution to this question. The ad hoc committee established under agenda item 1 to negotiate a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices devoted the little time available to it to a general exchange of views on relevant aspects of the treaty as a first step in the substantive negotiations which will start next year.

Furthermore, during the session successive Presidents, with the assistance of the outgoing and incoming Presidents, conducted intensive consultations and sought the views of the members of the Conference on an appropriate mechanism to deal with the issue of nuclear disarmament, making full use of all the proposals and views put forward

by delegations. These consultations confirmed the importance attached to finding a mutually acceptable basis for dealing with this issue. Although it was not possible to reach agreement on the establishment of any further mechanism to address nuclear disarmament before the end of the session, the Conference nevertheless agreed that the consultation process of the presidency on this important issue should resume at the start of the 1999 session.

The other substantive issues on the agenda, namely, anti-personnel landmines, the prevention of an arms race in outer space and transparency in armaments, were also the subject of intensive consultations undertaken by Special Coordinators appointed for these purposes. Although consensus was not achieved on the establishment of subsidiary bodies under these items, it was generally felt that further efforts should be pursued during the next session, taking into account the progress achieved in those consultations, and that the emerging convergence of views on the issues should be consolidated and built upon.

The Conference also continued the consideration of the expansion of its membership, the review of its agenda and its improved and effective functioning. Considerable attention was paid to the further expansion of membership of the Conference. As a result of his intensive consultations, the Special Coordinator was able to propose a formula for a possible consensus on this issue, which will require further examination at the beginning of the next session.

As may be seen from its report and its official records, the Conference on Disarmament benefited from its self-imposed period of pause and reflection. The Conference has now entered a new stage where it has gradually started to overcome the obstacles it faced and to consolidate the process of building consensus on its priority tasks, thus enabling it to play its role as the sole multilateral negotiating forum of the international community.

In this respect, in full cooperation with the incoming President of the Conference, Ambassador Robert Grey of the United States, I intend to fully use the inter-sessional period to conduct appropriate consultations with a view to laying the ground for a smooth and expeditious start to the next session. I am confident that the outcome of the deliberations of the First Committee will contribute to the attainment of our common objectives.

It only remains for me to express my deep gratitude to the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, to the Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, and the small team of dedicated staff for their invaluable support and assistance to the Conference.

Mr. Dausá Céspedes (Cuba) *(interpretation from Spanish):* Allow me on behalf of the Cuban delegation and on my own behalf, to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the post of Chairman of the First Committee. We are convinced that during your term of office our work will produce the success we all hope for. I would also like to extend my congratulations to the other members of the Bureau.

Fifty-two years have passed since the General Assembly adopted its first resolution designed to prevent the occurrence of a nuclear war that would wipe the human race off the face of the earth. The resolution was adopted at a time when memories of the horrendous experience of the nuclear bombing of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were still fresh in everyone's minds. The threat of a recurrence remains and has been multiplied a thousand times by the dizzying development of science and technology in this second half of the century, which has made possible a continuous modernization of nuclear weapons.

Let us speak frankly. Initiatives to eliminate and eradicate this threat once and for all have not been lacking. Two concrete examples are the 28-nation proposal to the Conference on Disarmament for a programme of action to eliminate nuclear weapons, and the ongoing initiatives of the Group of 21 in that same forum to create an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament that would have priority status. Neither of these proposals has succeeded because of the manifest lack of interest on the part of the nuclear Powers. From Cuba's perspective, nuclear disarmament remains the highest-priority topic in the realm of disarmament, and Cuba will continue to focus its main efforts in that direction.

The prohibition of nuclear testing was never an end in itself but was meant to be a step towards ending the qualitative development of nuclear weapons and promoting nuclear disarmament. Nevertheless, today different approaches are being imposed. A number of Powers for which nuclear explosions are simply no longer necessary persist in refusing to modernize their nuclear arsenals through sophisticated subcritical tests and supercomputers.

Recently the members of the Conference on Disarmament agreed to create two ad hoc committees, one

to initiate negotiations on negative security assurances and the other on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices. In Cuba's opinion, negative security assurances must be clearly reflected in a legally binding international instrument that is multilateral and non-discriminatory and will provide security for all non-nuclear-weapon States against the use of this type of weaponry. As regards negotiations on fissile materials, we are convinced that if we genuinely wish to take a genuine and effective step in the direction of nuclear disarmament, the agreement to be reached must take into consideration future production as well as handling existing stocks of fissile material.

It is a source of great satisfaction to my country to be a party to the multilateral treaties that seek to bring about the elimination of two types of weapons of mass destruction. I refer to the Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention, respectively. Cuba has presented many initiatives in the context of the Ad Hoc Group of Governmental Experts negotiating a verification mechanism related to the Biological Weapons Convention and is determined to continue to contribute to the progress of this Group's work. While reaffirming our preparedness to participate actively in initiatives designed to provide a political impulse to the negotiating process, we emphasize the need to avoid setting artificial deadlines for its conclusion.

As regards the Chemical Weapons Convention, the highest priority should be attached to bringing about the full implementation of all its provisions. In ratifying the Convention, the Government of Cuba declared that in keeping with the provisions of article 11 of the Convention, concerning economic and technological development, the commercial and financial embargo imposed by the Government of the United States on Cuba is entirely incompatible with the letter and spirit of this instrument. To this effect I wish to repeat that while this situation exists, and bearing in mind the provisions of the Convention, Cuba reserves the right to raise this case before the relevant bodies of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

It goes without saying that the lack of adequate control by States over their stockpiles and transfers of small arms and light weapons is causing a great deal of harm. Strengthening control should be a prime element of a strategy designed to combat the growing illicit traffic in arms. Cuba will continue to support unreservedly all multilateral efforts to respond effectively to the problems that arise in connection with small arms and light weapons. Cuba will object to any effort to manipulate the emergency nature of this effort in order to distort priorities in matters of disarmament adopted by the General Assembly in 1978.

As has been stated and restated in many multilateral forums, Cuba fully shares the humanitarian concerns provoked by the indiscriminate and irresponsible use of anti-personnel landmines. However, we cannot gloss over the national security implications of this topic and the need to bear them in mind whenever a balanced and realistic approach is sought.

For Cuba, a country that for almost four decades has been the victim of a policy of aggression and hostility from the country with the greatest political, economic and military might in the world, to renounce the use of this type of arms to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity is a luxury that we can ill afford. Our country uses landmines in the perimeter area bordering the Cuban territory illegally occupied by the United States for its naval base in Guantanamo, in the eastern province of Cuba. We try to avoid violations and provocations and to prevent military incursions from this external enclave. Those mines are duly registered and marked in keeping with the requirements set out in amended Protocol II of the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects.

In conclusion, I should like to recall that for three consecutive years the Committee has adopted a resolution presented by the member States of the Non-Aligned Movement on the observance of environmental norms in the drafting and implementation of agreements on disarmament and arms control. We hope that the text to be presented this year will once again receive the full support of all delegations.

Mr. Li Hyong Chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Allow me first to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as Chairman of the First Committee at the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. My delegation is confident that under your skilful guidance the work of the Committee will come to a successful conclusion. I wish to assure you of our full cooperation.

It is internationally recognized that nuclear disarmament is a top priority issue in global disarmament. Although the international community has been working hard towards eliminating nuclear weapons, no real progress has been made. We believe that the main problem is that nuclear-weapon States still pursue a cold-war theory of

nuclear deterrence based on their nuclear monopoly. The weakness of the existing nuclear non-proliferation system, clearly revealed in the process of disarmament debates so far, is caused by this nuclear deterrence theory.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, situated in a unique region geographically and politically, finds disarmament, nuclear disarmament in particular, to be an issue of critical importance. Basically, all the problems we are faced with in Korea, including peace and security and reunification, are related to disarmament. In this context we have been making every sincere effort for global disarmament and easing of tension and peace and security in the region.

My delegation is of the view that the objective of nuclear disarmament should be the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. To this end, first, a legally binding international agreement on the complete elimination of nuclear weapons should be concluded as early as possible. Nuclear-weapon States should not insist on their assertion that the discussion on the elimination of nuclear weapons be left to the nuclear-weapon States. They should respond positively to appeals by the non-nuclear-weapon States, including member States of the Non-Aligned Movement, to start multilateral negotiations on the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

In this connection my delegation maintains that the fourth special session of the United Nations General Assembly devoted to disarmament should be convened at the earliest possible date with a view to discussing intensively overall nuclear disarmament matters, particularly a timetable for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Secondly, the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones should be encouraged. The establishment of such zones represents an important way to achieve a nuclear-free world. The nuclear-weapon-free zones can never be secured by unilateral obligations on the part of non-nuclear-weapon States alone. That is possible only when the nuclear-weapon States assume their due obligations as well. The nuclear-weapon States should recognize the status of nuclear-weapon-free zones and provide unconditional and legally binding assurances not to use nuclear weapons against the nuclear-weapon-free zones and States in the region.

At the same time, the nuclear umbrella given selectively to certain regions and States should be removed. In order to realize the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, the United States should commit itself not to use nuclear weapons against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and should withdraw its nuclear umbrella from south Korea. As in the past we will continue to work for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and will actively join international efforts to make a nuclear-free world through completely dismantling nuclear weapons.

The situation in North-East Asia remains tense because of the military manoeuvres to form a new military alliance. Last year the Japan-United States defence cooperation guideline was revised, selecting the Korean Peninsula as the main operational target, and again this year an open attempt was made to revise the United States-south Korea mutual defence treaty, combining it with the new Japan-United States defence cooperation guideline.

Japan, motivated by a militarist and expansionist ambition, is trying to realize its overseas expansionist plan by invoking the new Japan-United States defence cooperation guideline and taking part in a series of US-led military exercises such as the "Rim-Pac 98" joint military exercises. The south Korean authorities are introducing a large quantity of modern and sophisticated military equipment such as F-15 fighter planes and AC-130 military helicopters, while begging for security protection from the United States and the permanent stationing of United States troops.

This military alliance is being formed under the pretext of coping with the threat from the north. However, it is unreasonable and unjustifiable to assert that we alone pose a menace to the allied forces of the United States, Japan and south Korea. On the contrary, we are threatened. As a matter of fact it cannot be denied that they may initiate a pre-emptive attack against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at any time they deem necessary. Under such circumstances we are compelled to devote a great deal of resources to increasing our defence capability even when we are in a very difficult belt-tightening situation in order to overcome all kinds of hardship.

The reality of the Korean Peninsula clearly testifies that the escalation of the arms race and the delicate situation in which another war may break out at any moment are caused solely by the military build-up of the United States, Japan and south Korea, and not by the threat from the north at all. This situation calls for dismantling the outdated cold-war structure of confrontation at the earliest possible time, thus ensuring durable peace and security in North-East Asia and on the Korean Peninsula in particular.

What is most important in removing the cold-war structure of confrontation on the Korean Peninsula is to establish a new peace mechanism to replace the existing armistice system. To this end a peace agreement should be concluded between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States, and United States forces must be pulled out of south Korea. There is no justification whatsoever for the United States to maintain its troops in south Korea since the cold war has ended, an agreement on non-aggression was concluded between the north and the south of Korea, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea/United States Agreed Framework was adopted, in which both parties have committed themselves to making joint efforts for peace and security. Moreover, the assertion that United States troops should remain in south Korea, even after the complete resumption of north-south relations and Korea's reunification, is in no way justifiable.

The issue of ensuring peace on the Korean Peninsula should be solved in the context of reunification. Reunifying the divided country is the most urgent national task facing the Korean people, the solution of which brooks no further delay. Since the reality on the Korean Peninsula is that neither side is willing to give up its system, reunification based on one system will inevitably lead to confrontation.

Given the situation on the Korean Peninsula, the most appropriate and realistic way to reunification is to form a unified confederal State transcending differences in ideology and system in accordance with the three principles for national reunification — independence, peaceful reunification and great national unity. These three principles have been agreed upon between the north and south of Korea, are supported by the United Nations and constitute a fundamental cornerstone for reunification. We are convinced that the proposal to achieve reunification through confederacy based on one nation, one State, two systems and two Governments, is the most realistic reunification formula that conforms to the specific situation of the Korean Peninsula.

For the reunification of the country, relations between north and south should be improved. Relations between north and south in any case should be relations for national unity and reunification. To claim a "north-south reconciliation" and a "sunshine policy" without discarding the notion of confrontation is not even worthy of consideration, and there is no need for dialogue, contacts and visits aimed at perpetuating division and confrontation.

In order to bring about genuine peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, the countries concerned should pursue impartial policies towards Korea. If they pursue biased policies rather than balanced ones, that will obviously instigate competition and confrontation between north and south and lay obstacles in the way of realizing peace and stability.

All these facts show that with a view to ensuring lasting peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, all relevant issues concerning a peace arrangement, north-south relations and reunification should be solved simultaneously, and among them reunification should be treated as a key issue. Accordingly, reunification through confederacy should be set as a common goal, and north and south should build relations of reconciliation and cooperation, moving towards confederation. The parties concerned should solve the issues of establishing a peace mechanism and ensuring regional security in conformity with confederal reunification, and the United States and other countries concerned should pursue impartial policies towards the Korean Peninsula, thus creating favourable conditions for realizing the confederation.

We believe that the time has come for the United Nations, which has intervened in the Korean question from the beginning, to have a correct understanding of the reality on the Korean Peninsula and to take an epochal measure to support confederal reunification so as to ensure durable peace and stability in this region as soon as possible.

Mr. Arcaya (Venezuela) *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I have the pleasure of saying how gratified the delegation of Venezuela is at your election, Sir, to the post of Chairman of the First Committee at the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. We are convinced that your experience and able guidance will guarantee us concrete results in the promotion of the objectives defined by the Organization in the field of disarmament. You, Sir, may rely on Venezuela's constant support in carrying out these tasks. We extend our congratulations also to the other members of the Bureau.

At the same time I must pay tribute to Mr. Mothusi Nkgowe of Botswana for his very effective guidance of the activities of the Committee during the fifty-second session. Allow me also to congratulate Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala on his appointment to the post of Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs. Thanks to his wide-ranging experience he will make a decisive contribution to the achievement of the lofty objectives that underpin United Nations actions in the field of disarmament.

In an international environment that is as promising as it is paradoxical, the United Nations has carried out a first-rate mission in the promotion of agreements and measures for disarmament of universal scope. However, progress achieved over the past few years and the new international security system that still remains a work in progress contain some contradictory elements, the magnitude and complexity of which — particularly in problems related to international peace, development and security — require the collective participation of all States without exception.

The elimination of nuclear weapons remains and unshirkable duty and a common aspiration. Countries possessing nuclear weapons are chiefly responsible for achieving this objective. To this effect, Venezuela is convinced of the need for the Conference on Disarmament, the sole forum for negotiating agreements and measures in this field, to establish an ad hoc committee to initiate negotiations on a gradual programme of negotiations with specific goals for completely eliminating this category of weapons of mass destruction.

A particularly encouraging factor in the multilateral disarmament agenda has been the establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee entrusted with negotiating an international non-discriminatory, multilateral and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. It is true that in the past few years important agreements on the reduction of nuclear weapons have been reached between the two countries with the greatest arsenals — I am thinking of START I and START II. However, despite our legitimate expectations concerning this process and the possibility of additional reductions, we note with concern that it has lost its momentum as a result of the non-ratification by one of the principal nuclear Powers of the START II Treaty. In this connection we urge both countries to intensify their efforts to achieve, within the stipulated deadline, the objectives defined in those instruments.

Efforts towards nuclear non-proliferation have been affected recently by the nuclear tests carried out by India and Pakistan. This has revealed the underlying nuclear threat inherent in the present international scenario; hence the need to strengthen through dialogue and international cooperation the set of norms and principles that regulate relationships among States in this field. We welcome the declaration made by both countries last September in which they announced their intention to accede to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

We also note with concern that there has been a lack of progress at the second meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. We are afraid that this might have a negative impact on the scope of the objectives of non-proliferation and disarmament established in article VI of that instrument, according to which nuclear-weapon States must act in good faith in adopting concrete disarmament measures. In the process of strengthening non-proliferation a positive fact has been Brazil's accession to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, a contribution of transcendent importance for the strengthening of international peace and security.

Keenly aware of the usefulness of nuclear-weapon-free zones in the promotion of international security, we reaffirm our support for the enhancement of political linkages among the areas established under the Treaties of Tlatelolco, Rarotonga, Pelindaba and Bangkok, and we support any initiatives towards the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones such as in Central Asia and the Middle East.

Turning to the threat presented by other categories of weapons of mass destruction, Venezuela welcomes the coming into force of the Paris Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction and the birth of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, in which Venezuela, as a State party since 1997, has the honour of participating as a member of the executive board. We hope to make constructive contributions towards the consolidation of this instrument and towards its full implementation.

In light of progress achieved in strengthening the international regime against bacteriological weapons, our country reaffirms the need for the ad hoc group established in 1994 to conclude negotiations on a protocol defining machinery for effective verification.

Latin America and the Caribbean have made a decisive contribution to the creation of measures of disarmament and in many cases have pioneered the achievement of agreements to promote a climate of peace and stability within the region. The Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Production of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials, signed last year within the Organization of American States, provides a political response to the problem of illicit trafficking in small arms, particularly the proliferation of such traffic. This illicit traffic in small arms

worsens domestic conflicts in many areas and links activities characteristic of uncivil society, such as terrorism, drug-trafficking, money laundering and organized crime, which today constitute serious threats to the stability and security of our countries. Venezuela supports the work of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms, particularly the recommendation to convene an international conference on illicit traffic in small arms in all its aspects.

A measure of particular importance in the area of conventional disarmament, in view of its undeniable humanitarian dimension, is the adoption of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. Venezuela, as a signatory to the Ottawa Convention, is embarking upon the necessary legislative procedures for ratification. We are gratified that with the deposit by Burkina Faso of the fortieth instrument of ratification, the Convention will come into force on 1 March 1999.

Trusting in the importance of multilateralism as a generator of agreements and measures for disarmament, we consider that convening the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament is an important element in restating the objectives of general and complete disarmament promoted by the Organization. At the same time we feel that the convening of the session should be the result of the general will of Member States of the United Nations. The configuration of a cooperative, international security system requires a multidimensional approach in which the causes of conflict are considered from an integral perspective so as to include political, economic and social aspects, *inter alia*, in reaffirming the inescapable relationship between peace and the development of peoples.

The conclusions we reach at this session will be particularly relevant to handling matters relating to the international community.

Ms. Belker (Croatia): On behalf of the Croatian delegation I congratulate you, Sir, and other members of the Bureau on your election, and I pledge to you our own best efforts.

The general debate has entered its fifth day. I have listened carefully to a number of comprehensive statements with much valuable input. Croatia shares many of the assessments and thoughts already expressed by other representatives. In my statement, therefore, I shall concentrate on Croatia's most pressing concerns regarding developments in disarmament and international security since last fall.

But first I should like to register the fact that Croatia has continued to fulfil its obligations as regards international regulatory disarmament and the non-proliferation regime. Croatia has signed the strengthened safeguards Protocol, ratified the Ottawa Convention and initiated the procedure for ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). In conventional weapons control, Croatia has carried out all the obligations deriving from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and article IV of the Dayton Accords related to weapons reduction and verification measures. We shall take an active role in the upcoming negotiations regarding article V of the Dayton Accords, thus confirming our strong support for the efforts of the international community in securing peace and stability both regionally and globally.

Secondly, while recognizing and welcoming the progress achieved in the last decade, Croatia cannot but share the concern that has already been voiced by many delegations here on the pace and tenor of developments in disarmament and international security since we last met. A comment related to another major international threat — the current global financial turmoil — seems pertinent to our debate. A prominent political analyst expressed his deep concern recently that the international community had failed to consolidate in the economic sphere the gains from the end of the cold war and that "we are now moving beyond the risk of missing opportunities to the risk of retrogression".

Indeed, 1998 has been a year of serious challenges in the field of disarmament, non-proliferation and international security. We have truly faced the risk of missing opportunities. Last fall we were able to point to a mixed year with significant achievements and some setbacks. We had the good fortune to welcome the adoption of the CTBT and strengthened safeguards measures, the beginning of the enhanced Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review process and the anticipated signing of the Ottawa agreement.

The ground that we have broken since then does not give us reason for great satisfaction. The South Asian nuclear crisis has caused great concern and has undermined the integrity and viability of the global non-proliferation regime. Missile proliferation and the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction continue to threaten regional and global security. Apart from the recent welcome agreement on plutonium management and disposition, the non-ratification of START II suggests a stand-still in the process of nuclear arms control. The strengthened NPT review process seems to have taken the opposite course. A decision to start

negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a global ban on anti-personnel landmines is overdue, particularly as we have the achievements of the Ottawa process to build upon. Croatia has been one of the most afflicted countries in Europe in that respect, and we are painfully aware of the urgency of this problem.

There is, fortunately, a silver lining to this situation. Croatia welcomes the long-awaited decisions in the Conference on Disarmament on the establishment of ad hoc committees on a fissile material cut-off treaty and negative security assurances. However, Croatia regrets that the Conference was unable to agree on further enlargement. We had hoped to be admitted in the first group on the basis of objective and transparent criteria. Croatia remains hopeful that the membership of the Conference on Disarmament will become more nearly universal.

Croatia is delighted, as are so many countries, at next year's entry into force of the Ottawa Convention. The growing number of States that have ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention is also a good development. Croatia welcomes the progress achieved in the work of the ad hoc group charged with drawing up a verification protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention and is looking forward to its early conclusion. At the regional level we consider the recent adoption of a European code of conduct on arms sales to be an important contribution to greater accountability and transparency in conventional arms control in Europe.

Naturally, development in international security and disarmament cannot be viewed in isolation from wider political and security realities. We live in a period of intense economic and financial distress and political volatility. Lagging behind in the disarmament process increases the existing threats to international security and inhibits the evolution of regional and global strategic environments. To make one hostage to the other is to do a great disservice to peace and international security.

Thirdly, having said all that, I am pleased to note that there are constructive suggestions on the table on ways and means to untangle this dangerous knot. Several countries from across the geographic and political spectrum have come up with pragmatic proposals that should help to move the process forward. Their efforts to bridge fundamental differences in approaches to the complex set of deterrence, arms control and disarmament problems are encouraging. In this respect, Croatia appreciates the sustained efforts by mainstream countries within the international community — such as South Africa, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden, as well as other countries — to seek, in the words of the South African representative, "to identify the middle ground and to avoid the trap of inaction". We also welcomed the eight-nation ministerial declaration on the need for a new agenda for a nuclear-weapon-free world. Croatia is committed to working with mainstream and other countries to advance our common goals.

We consider the proposed approaches realistic and grounded in our common interests and eventual shared benefits. We trust they will be given careful consideration and used as a basis upon which to build. To do that, a sense of historical perspective, realism and collective responsibility is required as well as a greater recognition of the need for political accommodation and compromise.

In order to achieve our goals we all have to be willing to back our words and commitments with deeds. This is the work that all of us must do together. All States, in particular the nuclear-weapon States, have their part to play in improving the present state of security and disarmament negotiations.

Fourthly, and finally, the world is at a particularly fragile stage. It is beyond the ability of any single country and the capacity of any single institution to keep the situation from deteriorating. It is not difficult to anticipate the ramifications of further procrastination in the disarmament debate. This year's developments should inject a sense of urgency into our deliberations. Different priorities, conflicting interests and regional security concerns need to be addressed politically, with more vigour and determination. But they also need to be measured against the vital interests of global peace and security so that a collaborative and productive approach to international security and disarmament can gain weight in international forums, starting with the First Committee.

The end of the cold war has provided a historical window of opportunity for all of us to try to move ahead in disarmament and international security. Can we honestly say that that window of opportunity has been used effectively? That is not a rhetorical question. I reflect upon it with the sense of missed opportunity that I mentioned earlier. At this session the First Committee must try to ensure that we do not continue beyond that point. We must summon our political will and focus our energies on carrying out our commitments and obligations. We have been bound to do so, politically and legally. The First Committee ought to give guidance on the necessary steps in the direction of sustainable disarmament in our own self-

interest and in the interest of sustainable development, peace and security, as stressed by the Secretary-General at the beginning of the session.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) *(interpretation from French)*: My delegation first wishes to express to you, Sir, our warmest congratulations on your election to the chairmanship of the First Committee. We also congratulate the members of the Bureau. We are convinced that under your guidance the Committee will make substantial progress on the important issues that lie on its agenda.

I also wish to thank Mr. Mothusi Nkgowe of Botswana, former Chairman of the First Committee, for the remarkable work carried out during course of the fifty-second session.

Disarmament is one issue on which considerable progress has been recorded in recent years but which, because of its complex nature, requires in its approach ever greater vigilance and determination. In fact, numerous and important initiatives are regularly undertaken throughout the world with the goal of reducing the potential of weapons of mass destruction and other categories of weapons.

The most important event that took place at the beginning of this session of the General Assembly was the announcement of the entry into force next March of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. The interest of many countries, and not the smallest, in this Convention records the will of the international community to rapidly achieve a world free of anti-personnel landmines. While Burkina Faso does not have this kind of weapon, it nevertheless joined early in the process of negotiations leading to the elaboration of the Convention, having regard for the devastating effects of anti-personnel landmines throughout the world, especially in Africa. It was the fortieth State to ratify the Convention, thus allowing for its entry into force.

At the same time, we are pursuing together with civil society, our efforts to make people aware, being convinced that awareness is a vital ally in efforts towards disarmament. In this total commitment by my country to rid our planet of anti-personnel landmines we can only welcome the offer from the Government of Mozambique to host the first meeting of States parties in Maputo in May 1999, with the firm hope that this meeting will further strengthen our determination to put into concrete form the application of this multilateral Convention.

One of the first actions will naturally be to gather the necessary resources for the needs of demining and for assistance to victims. In this respect we welcome the support and pledging of contributions from certain countries in the context of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

Among the progress made in recent years in disarmament we can cite the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (CWC). Here we should also add the creation and strengthening of nuclear-weapon-free zones, specifically those established by the Treaties of Tlatelolco, Rarotonga, Pelindaba and Bangkok. The creation of these zones on the basis of freely contracted agreements by the States concerned, contributes to the strengthening of international peace and security. That is why the efforts of non-nuclear-weapon States should be broadly encouraged and supported by the international community.

While welcoming this progress we remain aware that a great deal still remains to be done. With the end of the cold war nothing should justify the maintenance today of nuclear arsenals and other weapons of mass destruction, still less research and testing in the area of strategic weapons. In this respect my delegation hopes that the commitments made by India and Pakistan in the General Assembly will lead very rapidly to their accession to the various treaties and conventions. But if we want truly to guarantee peace and collective security, then general and complete disarmament is what our world requires.

Next in order we should also be concerned with the phenomenon of so-called small arms and light weapons, the uncontrolled export and circulation of which we know has grave consequences. During the first international meeting on controlling the flow of small arms, held in Oslo, Burkina Faso reaffirmed its support for the moratorium on the import, export and manufacture of these kinds of weapons and for the follow-up mechanism, the programme for coordination and assistance for security and development.

My country's determination to fight the proliferation of light weapons stems from its decision to seek peaceful settlements to crises and conflicts. In this spirit it hosted a meeting of ministers responsible for security in West African countries in June 1998 in Ouagadougou, under the auspices of Interpol. In that same spirit also, in November

1996, it actively contributed to the success of the Bamako conference on disarmament, conflict prevention and development in West Africa, during the course of which the idea arose for a moratorium on light weapons.

In this spirit too Burkina Faso participated in the meetings of the Agreement on Non-Aggression and Defence — ANAD — in March 1997 and May 1998. These meetings, as we know, recommended that member States not only ratify the moratorium but also expand the number of member States of the Economic Community of West African States. My country was also pleased to sponsor the resolution adopted at the fifty-second session of the United Nations General Assembly which endorses the Bamako conclusions. My delegation will again this year support any initiative along these lines.

From one conference to another we have noted that the international dimension of the scourge of small arms is becoming clearer. In order to contain and control this phenomenon, with its harmful effects on the stability of States and on peace and international security, we need to mobilize the international community. Therefore, to take account of this serious concern, the thirty-fourth Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), held from 1 to 10 June 1998 in Ouagadougou, adopted a relevant resolution on this issue. In doing so, the African leaders made the following observations: the proliferation of small arms constitutes a threat to the peace, security and stability of African States, whose state structures are still fragile; the accumulation and illegal holding of these weapons exacerbate violence and criminality, hampering development and jeopardizing the democratic process; and the proliferation of small arms is closely linked to other criminal activities which must also be treated within the context of the other initiatives aimed at reducing such activities.

In the immediate future, in addition to the moratorium, the OAU secretariat is responsible for gathering from member States full information on the breadth of the scourge and the measures already undertaken. To assist in this mission it is urgent that the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, installed in Lomé, be reactivated and rendered operational by giving it the necessary means.

Thus we see that the member States of the OAU are making a priority of the fight against the production, dissemination and use of small arms. But obviously this is a gigantic endeavour and they expect the international community to support their efforts, because basically it is one single fight, that of building a world where peace, security and stability prevail.

Mr. Nayeck (Mauritius): At the outset let me join the previous speakers in congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the chairmanship of the First Committee. We are fully confident that with your vast experience and able leadership you will steer the work of the Committee towards a fruitful and meaningful conclusion.

Disarmament should remain one of the world's priorities. It is inconceivable that some countries spend so much on their military budgets while the vast majority of the world's population is living in abject poverty and daily grapples for survival. Essential basic commodities are out of reach; clean water is a dream. The costs associated with one or two fighter planes can change the economies of many small developing States. Resources spent on armaments should be directed to sustainable development.

We welcome the emphasis placed on disarmament by the Secretary-General and the re-establishment of the Department of Disarmament Affairs headed by the distinguished Under-Secretary-General

I wish to inform the Committee of a fact that is perhaps not very well known to the international community. Mauritius does not have an army and is proud to be among the very few countries to have achieved this goal. We do not spend money on armaments. As Mauritius does not have an army, we are consequently pleased to submit a nil report yearly to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and would encourage other countries to do likewise. However, we wish that the scope of the Register had been expanded to include a broader category of weapons. Transparency in military expenditures and holdings is without doubt a confidence-building measure.

Mauritius is a party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and was one of the first countries to ratify the Chemical Weapons Convention and the African nuclear-weapon-free zone treaty, the Pelindaba Treaty. We are a party to the Ottawa Convention and are confident that its early entry into force next year will encourage more countries to join the world ban on anti-personnel landmines. We note with satisfaction that the Government of Mozambique will host the first conference of the States parties to the Ottawa Convention in Maputo.

Unfortunately Africa is plagued by landmines. The international community should increase its assistance in the demining process. In this context we applaud Australia's

"destroy a minefield" initiative. However, my delegation notes with dismay that new mines are being laid in Angola by the UNITA forces.

The destabilizing and devastating effects of illicit trafficking in small arms is a matter of grave concern. The Secretary-General in his report to the General Assembly on the work of the Organization has stated:

> "It is estimated that 90 per cent of those killed or wounded by light military weapons are civilians and, most shockingly, that 80 per cent of those are women and children." (*A/53/1, para. 50*)

This crude fact is shocking. Though significant measures are being taken in different parts of the world to combat the illicit trafficking in small arms, the international community must act swiftly to curb and eradicate this dangerous scourge. This illicit traffic is one of the major factors identified by the Security Council that lie at the roots of conflict in Africa.

Earlier this year we were reminded of the dangers for humanity of the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the attendant risk of a new arms race. No country can feel genuinely secure as long as the threat from nuclear weapons exists in any quarter. We also believe that any international instrument for the elimination of nuclear arsenals should be non-discriminatory in nature. Mauritius welcomes the resumption of constructive dialogue between India and Pakistan and commends the restraint shown by the two countries.

Mauritius has always believed that there is no justification for the maintenance of any arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. We are therefore convinced that there is an urgent need for the total elimination of weapons of mass destruction and also a pressing need for the total elimination of nuclear weapons within a time-bound framework. Security for all will be achieved only when this threat is completely eliminated.

We welcome the positive developments in the Conference on Disarmament with the establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee on Effective International Arrangements to Assure Non-Nuclear-Weapon States against the Use or Threat of Use of Nuclear Weapons. It is regrettable that once more the Conference on Disarmament has failed to establish the ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament. We note with satisfaction, however, the establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee on a fissile material cut-off treaty. To be credible and fully universal any fissile material cut-off treaty must address the question of past and existing stockpiles of fissile material.

The Secretary-General rightly reminded us at our third meeting:

> "The fact that it is the First Committee of the General Assembly reflects the priority given to disarmament by the United Nations in its earliest days."

That emphasis was right and should continue to guide us in our deliberations during the work of this session.

As we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights this year, let us redouble our efforts and work closely to rid ourselves of all weapons of mass destruction so that we may live in a more peaceful world.

Mr. Amehou (Benin) *(interpretation from French)*: My delegation wishes, just as those who spoke before me, very warmly to congratulate you, Sir, on your brilliant election to the chairmanship of the First Committee at the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. This choice did not come about by chance. It was the logical consequence of all the efforts which you yourself and your country have exerted and continue to invest in international peace and security. In knowing thus your exceptional qualities, my delegation feels very reassured that under your chairmanship the results of our present deliberations will be encouraging.

My congratulations are also addressed to the Secretary-General, who spares no effort where questions of peace and international security are concerned and who kindly addressed the Committee at the commencement of its work.

The current agenda of work is both interesting and varied and includes complex issues. My delegation will take them up with you, Sir, and all other delegations with an open and constructive mind.

Benin, a peace- and justice-loving country, is undertaking through its institutions, its lifestyle and its culture, to develop the culture of peace and to oppose violence. Benin supports a peaceful settlement of all conflicts. Thus my Government supports the revitalization of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, based in Lomé.

The international community has recorded much success in these past few years in disarmament. As evidence of this, suffice it to look at the list of various international conventions that have already entered into force or are about to enter into force. Thus my delegation welcomes the imminent entry into force on 1 March 1999 of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. It is regrettable, however, that combatants in many wars continue to use these barbaric weapons which for several years after the end of hostilities still spread desolation and poverty among innocent civilians, especially women and children who are the main victims of these disaster-causing devices.

My delegation thus urgently appeals to all those countries still hesitating to sign and ratify this Convention to join the ranks of those who have chosen no longer to expose the children of our peace-loving populations to the dangers of mutilation.

In spite of the success I have mentioned, 1998 has brutally reminded us that unfortunately our world is still not free of the risk of nuclear annihilation. I wish here to mention the nuclear tests carried out by India and Pakistan. Our Assembly should in this respect further reflect with a view to proposing new and innovative ideas and concepts which would finally bind mankind to the path of true general and complete disarmament.

Regarding chemical and biological weapons, it is still disconcerting to know that certain States continue to stockpile and secretly develop them. These States are thus posing a grave threat to world peace and security.

Disarmament efforts by the international community in recent years have not dwelt on small arms or light weapons and their unbridled proliferation which presents great danger to security, especially in Africa where this situation continues to threaten the peace and security of many countries. Indeed the proliferation of these weapons has caused the destabilization of many African regimes. It has introduced insecurity, banditry and violence in several regions, both rural and urban. The consequence of this state of affairs is the blocking of economic activity, thus eloquently illustrating the indissociable link between peace and sustainable development.

The Government of my country actively participates in work to establish within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) a moratorium on the importing, exporting and manufacture of small arms. These laudable efforts on the part of ECOWAS to establish a climate of peace and reciprocal confidence in the subregion should be supported by the international community through sustained assistance to demobilize and, in particular, to reintroduce the former combatants from Sierra Leone and Liberia into social life. This assistance should take into account, in the entire subregion, the collection and even repurchase from these former combatants of their small arms and ensure their effective destruction. It is only through such bold action that the international community will help the subregion of West Africa to reduce in the initial stage and in acceptable proportions the supply of weapons in circulation there. Thus we will be able to define together a reliable mechanism which will allow us to guarantee effective control of the flow of small arms from the producer to the consumer.

Our fading century has witnessed violence and human barbarity, of which thousands of our fellow human beings have been victims. It is our duty to use all our energies to save the next century from these wars, these tragedies. My country, Benin, remains convinced that only a culture of peace will be able to help us in this. Together let us spare the twenty-first century the disasters of war experienced in the twentieth century, through the efforts which each one of our delegations will have made.

Election of the Rapporteur

The Chairman: I should now like to revert to the organizational business of the election of a rapporteur. I have been informed by the Chairman of the Group of African States that the candidate nominated by that Group is Mr. Motaz Zahran of Egypt.

If there is no objection I shall take it that in accordance with rule 103 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly and with established practice, the Committee wishes to dispense with the secret ballot and to declare Mr. Zahran Rapporteur of the Committee by acclamation.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: I extend to Mr. Zahran my warm congratulations on his election. I am sure that he will make a great contribution to the work of the First Committee at this session.

Mr. Zahran (Egypt) *(interpretation from Arabic):* I will not prolong the meeting. I only wish to express my deep gratitude to you, Sir, and to the various delegations in

this Committee for my election as Rapporteur of the First Committee during the present session of the General Assembly. I wish also to extend my thanks to the Group of African States for nominating me to the post. I hope I will live up to their expectations while carrying out my functions.

Without doubt the different, intricate developments in the international arena during past years which reflect directly on the field of disarmament are matters that should be given the appropriate priority and will no doubt make this session unique and totally different from previous sessions, at least since I personally started to work in this sphere when I was associated with the United Nations disarmament fellowship programme in 1993.

In conclusion, I wish to affirm that I will exert every effort and endeavour, with the moderate experience I have in the field of disarmament and international security, so that combined with your efforts, Sir, and the efforts of the Vice-Chairmen and members of the Secretariat, this session will be a success and we will be able to reach the objectives to which we all aspire.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.